



Montana Statewide Dropout Report 2001-02

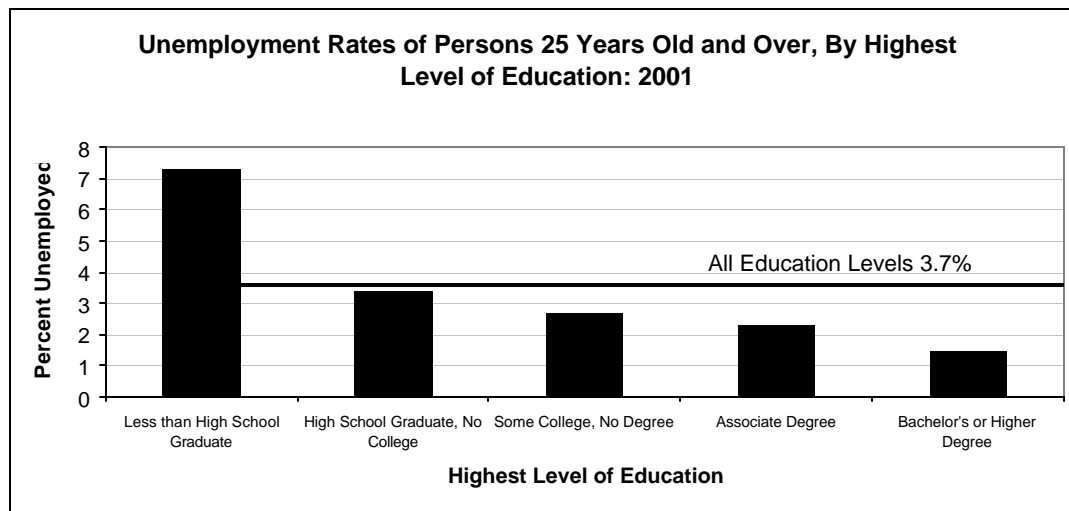
April 2003

Montana schools have reported dropout numbers to the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) since 1994-95 using a consistent dropout reporting method developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Schools are provided with a handbook listing conditions for determining whether or not a student is considered a dropout. Schools report data for grades 7 through 12 by gender and racial/ethnic categories. Each fall the schools provide dropout data for the prior year. In 2001-02, reports were received from all accredited schools with grades 7 through 12.

The Impact of Dropping Out of School

Students who drop out of school face a bleak economic world to a much greater degree than youths in general. According to the Digest of Education Statistics, as of October 2000, 28 percent of the 1999-00 dropouts were unemployed. By way of comparison, only 13 percent of 1999-00 recent graduates not enrolled in college were unemployed. (NCES, 2001)

As shown in the graph below, employment opportunities for high school dropouts continue to lag far behind their counterparts who attain a high school diploma or a college degree.



(Labor, 2001)

As recently as the 1970s, holding a high school diploma was considered an adequate, but not an essential, asset for entering the labor market. With the technological advances of the last 30 years fueling the demand for a more highly skilled labor force, a high school education is now considered the minimum requirement for obtaining employment or furthering one's education. (NCES, 2000) It is estimated that six out of 10 new jobs require skilled workers with math and reading skills above the 9th grade level, effective communication skills, problem-solving abilities, computer skills, and the ability to work on a team. At the same time, the largest declines in the job market are in low-skill, manufacturing areas. (NEGP, 2001) Dropouts who do manage to find employment can expect to earn approximately 35 percent less than the average salary of a high school graduate. (NCES, 2001)

Dropouts are three times as likely as high school completers that do not go on to college to receive public assistance. (NCES, 1998) Approximately one-third of female dropouts are pregnant and facing child-rearing responsibilities without an education or job experience to support their children adequately. (NEGP, 2001)

In addition to these grim economic statistics, dropouts also make up a disproportionate percentage of the prison population, comprising 26.5 percent of federal prison population, 39.7 percent of the state prison population, and 46.5 percent of the local jail inmate population. (Justice, 2003) This is far costlier to both the individual and to society than a high school and/or college education.

Calculating the Dropout Rate

Dropout rates can be calculated and reported in three different ways: event rates (snapshot of those who drop out in a single year), status rates (proportion of population who have not completed school and are not enrolled), and cohort rates (a more comprehensive picture which follows a sample group of students over time and generalizes their rate to a larger group). The collection method used in this report is an event rate adapted from the NCES at the U.S. Department of Education and is consistent with the requirements of the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) reporting.

Who is a Dropout?

A dropout is an individual who:

- Was enrolled in school on the date of the previous year October enrollment count or at sometime during the previous school year and was not enrolled on the date of the current school year October count; or
- Was not enrolled at the beginning of the previous school year but was expected to enroll and did not reenroll during the year (“no show”) and was not enrolled on the date of the current school year October count; and
- Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved high school educational program; and
- Has not transferred to another school, been temporarily absent due to a school-recognized illness or suspension, or died. (OPI, 2002)

How is a Dropout Rate Calculated?

Dropout data is collected for grades 7 through 12 by gender and racial/ethnic categories. Dropout rates are calculated by dividing the number of dropouts as defined above by the October enrollment total, as reflected in the first bullet above. Disaggregated rates can be obtained by calculating the male/female dropout rates, and the rates by race/ethnicity to determine if some groups of students are more likely to drop out.

Because the number of students enrolled for small schools and racial minority groups is relatively low, small annual changes in data can cause wide variations in annual dropout. For example, in a class with 10 students, one dropout would translate to a 10 percent dropout rate. A more realistic indicator of the dropout rate for small schools and racial minority groups is an average of several years.

2001-02 Dropout Data

- ✓ Montana accredited schools reported that 2,047 students dropped out of grades 7 through 12 in 2001-02.
- ✓ The 2001-02 dropout rate for Montana grades 7 and 8 was 0.4 percent.
- ✓ The 2001-02 dropout rate for Montana high schools was 3.8 percent.
- ✓ Although minorities represent 13.2 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12, they account for 30.1 percent of the dropouts. White students represent 86.8 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12 and 69.9 percent of the dropouts.
- ✓ Males represent 52 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12 and 57 percent of the dropouts.
- ✓ Females represent 48 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12 and 43 percent of the dropouts.

Dropout Rates by Grade and Gender

In Montana schools, more males than females are enrolled at every grade level. About 52 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12 is male and 48 percent is female. Males also have higher dropout rates at most grade levels, resulting in a total 2001-02 dropout count of 295 more males dropping out than females.

Observations of Table 1—Rates by Grade and Gender

- ✓ 57 percent of the total dropouts were male and 43 percent were female.
- ✓ The 7th and 8th grade dropout rates are relatively low (0.4 percent), but represent 110 students leaving school at a very early age.
- ✓ The highest number of dropouts and overall dropout rate is seen at grade 10, when many students turn 16 and students can legally exit the school system. (Montana law states: “Except as provided in [Montana Code Annotated §20-5-102(2)], any parent, guardian, or other person who is responsible for the care of any child who is 7 years of age or older prior to the first day of school in any school fiscal year shall cause the child to be instructed in the program prescribed by the board of public education pursuant to 20-7-111 until the later of the following dates: (a) the child's 16th birthday; (b) the date of completion of the work of the 8th grade.” Montana Code Annotated §20-5-102(1) (2001).)

Table 1
2001-02 Montana Dropout Rates by Grade and Gender

Grade	Dropout Rates			Dropout Numbers		
	Male	Female	Statewide	Male	Female	Statewide
HS Total	4.2%	3.4%	3.8%	1,104	833	1,937
Gr 12	4.8%	3.3%	4.1%	281	191	472
Gr 11	4.5%	3.6%	4.1%	288	218	506
Gr 10	4.7%	4.1%	4.4%	325	260	585
Gr 9	3.0%	2.5%	2.7%	205	161	366
Ungraded* HS	7.4%	5.3%	6.4%	5	3	8
7 & 8 Total	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	67	43	110
Gr 8	0.8%	0.4%	0.6%	51	25	76
Gr 7	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	15	18	33
Ungraded* 7-8	3.7%	0.0%	2.2%	1	0	1
Overall Total	3.0%	2.4%	2.7%	1,171	876	2,047

* “A class that is not organized on the basis of grade grouping and has no standard grade designation.” (NCES)

Dropout Rates by Racial/Ethnic Categories

Dropout rates vary by racial/ethnic categories and for most minority groups are higher than the dropout rates for white students. In the 2001-02 school year, Montana school enrollment for grades 7 through 12 included 86.8 percent white students, 10.0 percent American Indians, 0.9 percent Asians, 1.7 percent Hispanics, 0.5 percent blacks, and 0.1 percent Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. Because the number of minority students is relatively low, their annual dropout rates may vary widely from year to year. Averages of a period of years are more realistic indicators of the dropout rates. Table 2 lists the dropout rates for four years, and the average of those years.

Observations of Table 2— Four-Year Averages for Racial/Ethnic Categories

- ✓ Although minorities represent only 13.2 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 through 12, they account for 30.1 percent of the total dropouts.
- ✓ For the 2001-02 school year, American Indian students represent 11.3 percent of the total school enrollment for grades 7 and 8, but account for 68.2 percent of the total dropouts.
- ✓ For the 2001-02 school year, American Indian students represent 9.3 percent of the total high school enrollment, but account for 24.4 percent of the total dropouts.
- ✓ On average American Indian students drop out of grades 7 and 8 at a rate more than 12 times that of white students.
- ✓ On average American Indian students drop out of high school at a rate more than three times that of white students.

Table 2
Montana Dropouts by Racial/Ethnic Categories for Four Years

Category	7 th & 8 th Grade Dropout Rates					High School Dropout Rates				
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	4-yr Avg	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	4-yr Avg
American Indian	2.2%	1.7%	3.3%	2.7%	2.5%	10.5%	11.0%	10.4%	10.0%	10.5%
Asian	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%	3.0%	3.0%	3.5%	2.1%	2.9%
Hispanic	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	5.6%	4.8%	8.3%	5.1%	5.9%
Black	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%	8.2%	8.2%	4.9%	6.5%	6.9%
Pacific Islander*	---	---	0.0%	0.0%	---	---	---	2.4%	1.3%	---
All Minority	1.9%	1.5%	2.7%	2.1%	2.0%	9.3%	9.6%	9.5%	8.6%	9.2%
White	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	3.5%	3.4%	3.5%	3.1%	3.4%
Statewide	0.6%	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	4.1%	4.1%	4.2%	3.8%	4.1%

* "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander" racial/ethnic category added for the 1999-00 dropout data and the 2000-01 fall enrollment data, which is consistent with the U.S. Census categories.

Dropout Rate by Size of District

For the purposes of comparing similarly sized school districts, Montana districts have been identified by size categories based on enrollment numbers. Table 3 provides dropout data for the identified size categories.

Category- Elementary Enrollment

1E= more than 2,500 students

2E= 851 to 2,500 students

3E= 401 to 850 students

4E= 151 to 400 students

5E= 41 to 150 students

6E= 40 or fewer students

Category- High School Enrollment

1H= more than 1,250 students

2H= 401 to 1,250 students

3H= 201 to 400 students

4H= 76 to 200 students

5H= 75 or fewer students

Category- K-12 Districts

1K= 400 or more students

2K= 399 or fewer students

Table 3
Montana Dropout Rate by School District Size

Level	1E,1H	2E,2H	3E,3H	4E,4H	5E,5H	6E	1K	2K	All Schools
7/8 dropouts									
2001-02 rate	0.2%	0.9%	0.8%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%
2000-01 rate	0.2%	0.9%	1.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%
1999-00 rate	0.2%	0.2%	1.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
1998-99 rate	0.6%	0.4%	0.7%	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%
4-yr average rate	0.3%	0.6%	0.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.5%
HS dropouts									
2001-02 rate	4.2%	4.5%	4.0%	3.9%	1.0%	NA	2.5%	1.5%	3.8%
2000-01 rate	4.5%	5.4%	4.2%	3.5%	1.4%	NA	3.3%	1.8%	4.2%
1999-00 rate	4.4%	4.9%	4.1%	4.0%	4.4%	NA	2.3%	2.5%	4.1%
1998-99 rate	4.9%	3.6%	4.0%	3.5%	4.0%	NA	3.5%	2.0%	4.1%
4-yr average rate	4.5%	4.6%	4.1%	3.7%	2.8%	NA	2.9%	1.9%	4.1%

Another Type of Dropout Indicator— The Completion Rate

The dropout rates identified thus far in this report are annual snapshots of grade-by-grade dropouts. Those annual rates can be used to build a “synthetic” school completion rate for a specific class of students even though each student is not followed through high school. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed a formula as a practical way to calculate a completion rate after studying a variety of calculation methods. Using statewide data, the following completion rate has been calculated for the Class of 2002.

Table 4
Montana High School Completion Rate

A. Graduates 2001-02*	10,845
Dropouts Reported Grade 12-- 2001-02	472
Dropouts Reported Grade 11-- 2000-01	569
Dropouts Reported Grade 10-- 1999-00	538
Dropouts Reported Grade 9-- 1998-99	453
 B. Total Graduates + 4 Years of Dropouts	 12,877
 Divide the Number of Graduates (A) by Total Graduates + Dropouts (B)	 10,845/12,877 84.2%

* GED recipients are not counted as graduates.

What Helps Prevent Students from Dropping Out?

Several studies have identified effective strategies to prevent students from leaving high school before receiving a diploma (NEGP, 2000). Some of those strategies include:

- Providing intensive intervention through smaller alternative middle and high schools.
- Focusing on changing the classroom experience through professional development to improve curriculum and instruction rather than focusing on dropout prevention services.
- Mentoring and tutoring by supportive adults and peers.
- Evaluating the impact of policies, practices, and structures on all students.
- Providing collective support to school and student needs through community and family collaboration.

Final Note

Policy implications that were identified by research studies as critical to the effectiveness of dropout intervention strategies included:

- The choice of teachers is more important than the choice of curriculum.
- The high school level may be too late to begin implementing intervention strategies.
- Data is needed to design appropriate strategies to prevent students from dropping out (NEGP, 2000).

The goal of gathering dropout information is to identify where and when students drop out of school and to use this knowledge to help keep students in school. Each community needs to learn the unique reasons why students drop out of their schools and, as a community, participate in supporting interventions to keep them in school and perhaps break the cycle of at-risk factors.

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Additional Dropout Resources on the Web

- National Center for Education Statistics- <http://www.nces.ed.gov/>
- National Dropout Prevention Center/Network - <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>
- National Education Goals Panel- <http://www.negp.gov/>
- United States Census Bureau- <http://www.census.gov/index.html>

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